

Islamic Period Coins from Kashmir Smast, Ancient Gandhāra

* Dr. M. Nasim Khan

Abstract

The ancient history of Gandhāra, particularly after the Great Kushan till to the arrival of Islam, has always remained a shrouded part of Gandhāran history and is considered a matter of great dispute. Same is the case for the early arrival of Muslims in the northern region of Pakistan where the early Muslim conquest has been traced back to the 10th/11th century AD. This is generally based on historical sources and the few fragmentary inscriptions recovered from the different parts of Gandhāra and its surrounding regions. But the recent discovery of previously unknown Islamic period coins found at the site known as Kashmir Smast, located in the Mardan district, may push further back the presence of Muslims in Gandhāra in to an earlier date. The objective of the present paper is, therefore, to supplement these numismatic evidences to the already recorded epigraphical and other records and try to trace the arrival of Muslims in the region of Gandhāra, may be in the 7th/8th centuries AD.

Both historical as well as archaeological sources are timid about the early history of Muslims in the north-west region of Pakistan, before Mahmud's invasion of Gandhāra. The only historical reference that confirms the presence of Muslims in the north of Pakistan is the description of an invasion by a Muslim general **Al Muhallab bin Abi Safurah** who served under the caliph Mu'āwiyah, campaigning in South Asia and raiding the country between Kābul and Multān in 44 AH (664 AD).¹ In *Futūḥ al-Buldān* of Aḥmad Ibn Yaḥyā *al-Balādhurī*,

* Professor of Archaeology/Director Institute of Archaeology and Social Anthropology, University of Peshawar.

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the raids of Bannu and Lahore, said to be located between Kabul and Multan, are explained in the following words:

ثُمَّ غَزَا ذَلِكَ الثَّغْرَ الْمُهَلَّبَ بْنِ أَبِي صُفْرَةَ فِي أَيَّامِ مَعَاوِيَةَ سَنَةَ أَرْبَعٍ وَأَرْبَعِينَ فَأَتَى بَنَةَ وَالْأَهْوَاذَ وَهُمَا بَيْنَ الْمُلْتَانِ وَكَابُلَ فَلَقِيَهُ الْعَدُوُّ فَقَاتَلَهُ وَمِنْ مَعِهِ، وَلَقِيَ الْمُهَلَّبَ بِلَادَ الْقَيْقَانِ ثَمَانِيَةَ عَشَرَ فَارِسًا مِنَ التُّرْكِ عَلَى خَيْلٍ مُحَذَوْفَةٍ فَقَاتَلُوهُ فَقَتَلُوا جَمِيعًا، فَقَالَ الْمُهَلَّبُ: مَا جَعَلَ هَؤُلَاءِ الْأَعَاجِمَ أَوْلَى بِالتَّشْمِيرِ مِنَّا فَحَذَفَ الْخَيْلَ فَكَانَ أَوَّلَ مَنْ حَذَفَهَا مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَفِي بَنَةِ يَقُولُ الْأَزْدِيُّ:

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ الْأَزْدَ لَيْلَةً بَيْتُوا ... بَيْنَهُ كَانَ خَيْرٌ جَيْشِ الْمُهَلَّبِ¹

“Then Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufrah invaded those front line fortress towns in the reign of Mu’āwiyah in the year 44 [AH]. He advanced towards Bannah [now Bannu] and Ahwāz, the cities located between Multan and Kabul. The enemy encountered him and fought him and his men. In the lands of Qīqān [the areas of old Baluchistan] Muhallab met 18 Turkish cavalry riding on horses with their tails rolled up; they fought him and all of them were killed, Muhallab said [on this occasion]: How can these non-Arabs be faster in rolling than us!? So he [also] ordered rolling up the tails of his horses and became the first Muslim general to have done so”. One from the tribe of Azd says about the encounter of Bannu: ‘Did you not know that the men who fought all night at Bannu were the best soldiers of Muhallab’s army’”.

The same event is described by Ibn al-Athīr in his book *al-Kamil fī al-Tarikh*²:

ذَكَرُ غَزْوِ الْمُهَلَّبِ السَّنَدَ : غَزَا الْمُهَلَّبُ بْنُ أَبِي صُفْرَةَ ثَغْرَ السَّنَدِ فَأَتَى بَنَةَ وَالْأَهْوَاذَ، وَهُمَا بَيْنَ الْمُلْتَانِ وَكَابُلَ، فَلَقِيَهُ الْعَدُوُّ وَقَاتَلَهُ، وَلَقِيَ الْمُهَلَّبَ بِلَادَ الْقَيْقَانِ ثَمَانِيَةَ عَشَرَ فَارِسًا مِنَ التُّرْكِ فَقَاتَلُوهُ فَقَتَلُوا جَمِيعًا، فَقَالَ الْمُهَلَّبُ: مَا جَعَلَ هَؤُلَاءِ الْأَعَاجِمَ أَوْلَى بِالتَّشْمِيرِ مِنَّا! فَحَذَفَ الْخَيْلَ، وَكَانَ أَوَّلَ مَنْ حَذَفَهَا مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ، وَفِي يَوْمٍ بَنَةُ يَقُولُ الْأَزْدِيُّ:

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ الْأَزْدَ لَيْلَةً بَيْتُوا ... بَيْنَهُ كَانَ خَيْرٌ جَيْشِ الْمُهَلَّبِ

Another historical reference about the Muslim invasions of Kabul and its surrounding regions in 44 AH (664 AD) comes from *Tarikh Khalifa ibn Khayyāt* of Abū 'Amr Khalifa ibn Khayyāt al Laythī al 'Uṣfurī (c. 777 - c.854), a famous Arab historian who wrote³:

اِفْتَتَحَ ابْنُ غَامِرٍ كَابُلَ وَقَتَلَ بِكَابُلِ أَبُو قَتَادَةَ الْعُدَوِيَّ وَيُقَالُ الَّذِي قَتَلَ أَبُو رِفَاعَةَ الْعُدَوِيَّ وَمِنْ سَبْيِ كَابُلِ مَكْحُولُ الشَّامِيِّ وَسَالِمُ بْنُ عَجْلَانَ الْأَفْطَسُ وَكَيْسَانَ أَبُو أَيُّوبَ بْنُ أَبِي تَمِيمَةَ السَّخَّيْنِيَّ وَمِنْهُمْ نَافِعُ

مولى ابن عَمْرٍ ومهران أَبُو حميد الطَّوِيل وفيهَا غزا الْمُهَلْبُ بْنُ أَبِي صَفْرَةَ أَرْضَ الْهِنْدِ فَسَارَ إِلَى قَنْدَابِيلَ ثُمَّ
أَخَذَ إِلَى بَنَةِ وَأَلَاهُورَ وَهُمَا فِي سَفْحِ جَبَلِ كَابِلَ فَلَقِيَئُهُمْ عَدُوهُمُ اللَّهُ وَمَلَأَ الْمُسْلِمُونَ أَيْدِيَهُمْ وَأَنْصَرَفُوا
سَالِمِينَ

“Ibn ‘Āmir conquered Kabul. Abū Qatādah al-‘Adawī and according to another report Abū Rifā’ah al-‘Adawī got killed in the combat, while Makhūl al-Shāmī, Sālīm son of ‘Ajalān al-Aftas, Kīsān Abū Ayyūb son of Abī Tamīmah al-Sikhtiyānī, Nāfi’ *mawlā* of Ibn ‘Umar and Mihrān Abū Ḥamid al-Ṭawīl were imprisoned. And in this year Muhallab attacked the Indian lands. He advanced towards Qandābīl, then to Battah [Bannah/Bannu] and al-Ahwaz. Both these cities are located at the foot of the Kabul Mountain. The enemy met them and with the grace of Allah was defeated. The Muslim army got its hands full [with booty] and returned safe and sound”.

The archaeological sources about the presence of Muslims or their occupations of the region are two folds: numismatic evidence and epigraphical records. The confirmed numismatic evidences are the Ghaznavid coins mostly found in stray. History says that Hindu Shahis were overthrown by this Muslim dynasty in the north and laid the foundation of Islamic empire in the region. But as far as inscriptions are concerned, they are very few in numbers and are mostly found in the south at Bambhore site in Sind or recorded in the different areas of ancient Gandhāra and its surrounding regions. Those recorded in the north push back the history of Muslims not more than before the first half of the 9th century AD. While the recent discovery of Islamic period coins at Kashmir Smast may suggest that the Muslims probably might have being in the region since 7th/8th century AD, when they first came to the area either as traders, pilgrims or invaders.

The presence of Arabs in the Indo-Pak subcontinent was first attested in the first half of the 7th century AD.⁴ before Muhammad bin Qasim invasion of Sind in 711 AD.⁵, who is regarded the first Muslim ruler who entered the subcontinent and laid the foundation of an Islamic empire in the region. Al Balāduri, said to be the most reliable Arab historian, states that the Abbasid Caliph Musta’işim Billāh (218-228 AH = 833-842 AD) appointed ‘Anbisa ibn Ishāq al Ḍabī governor of Sind⁶ and it is said that during Muhammad bin Qasim time (711 AD) portion

of the Hindu temple at Banbhore was demolished and during his time the upper and the lower parts were converted into a prison⁷. While Muslims occupation of the northern region of Pakistan, as told earlier, is related to Mahmud's invasion of Peshawar region in 11th century AD. On the other hand the presence of Muslims in the north is attested in some historical accounts to the 7th century AD. However due to lack of archaeological sources it could not have been taken into account seriously. But since the discovery of Islamic period coins in the Kashmir Smast it is the time to revisit the history of Gandhāra and try to understand the early presence of Muslims in the area in the light of both historical and archaeological evidences related to the region.

Coins from Kashmir Smast

Apart from the epigraphic evidence found in the different parts of Pakistan, the recent discovery of Islamic period coins from Kashmir Smast is another important body of evidence which may suggest the early presence of Muslims in the region of Gandhāran somewhere in the first quarter of the 7th century AD. But before reaching to any conclusion, it would be more appropriate to analyze the coins from Kashmir Smast in its archaeological and numismatic context.

The archaeological site of Kashmir Smast is situated in the heartland of ancient Gandhāra about 50 kilometres North-East of Mardan, Northern Pakistan. The cave and the other important establishments lie in the mountain range of Sakra at an altitude of 1100m and 1960 from the sea level. The remains here mainly consists of the Great Cave (Mahaguha), small rock cut shelters, water reservoirs and the main monastic area which comprise the Shiva temple, lingam shrines, soak area, double story structures, etc.⁸ This site has been subject to illegal diggings for the last many years. Thousands of antiquities have so far been recovered from the site through these clandestine activities. The so far recorded antiquities, detached from their archaeological context, and the excavation conducted by the author at the site has already confirmed that the site is of great historical and religious significance. Besides the discovery of several epigraphical data, seals and sealings, sculptures and other objects of historical significance along with thousands of coins have so far been recovered from the site which confirms an un-interrupted and a successive occupation of the site

started from at least the second century AD till to the period of the Sultans of Delhi. The most significant group of these coins belongs to the Hun period and the previously unknown coins to be associated with the Islamic period a chronological table for which is rather difficult to establish.

The previously unknown Islamic period coins in copper, mostly small denomination occur in large number. Some of them are already known coins while one group of them is totally new to the numismatists and historians of the region. Although it is not essay to establish an exact chronological table for these coins but, on the basis of their types and designs depicted on the coins, a certain sequence can be framed out. The coins included in the present paper can be classified into four main groups.

Group A: In this group, the obverse bears a human bust in $\frac{3}{4}$ to right and the reverse is marked probably with a circle having a dot in its centre.



Group B: In the second group, the obverse shows a facing bust in outline shown with a round face having fleshy nose and eyes in round. The reverse design is similar to that of Group A.



Group C: The third group consists of coins where the obverse shows probably a schematic representation of a crowned facing bust. The reverse here shows two concentric circles; there is a dot, as we have in the previous examples, in the centre.



Group D: This group comprises of coins where the obverse shows almost the same type of human head as in Group C but the reverse design is similar to a crescent with a star in form of a circle or the reverse may represent double parallel bold lines but in this case they should be considered broken.



Group E: In this Group, the obverse probably shows the same type of crowned bust as in the previous examples but the outer circle on the reverse gives the form of a crescent in outline while the star is marked with a small circle with a dot in the middle.



Group F: Here the bust on the reverse is replaced with a leaf shaped design while the design on the obverse stays the same as in Group E.



Group G: In the next variety the obverse of the coin is shown with a lion in contour as to be observed on the Hindu Shahi period coins while the reverse bears the same crescent and star symbols as noticed on the previous examples.



Group H: Here the obverse is depicted with a lion in contour and facing to the left. The reverse of the coins bears Arabic inscriptions written in early style



and could be partially read either *Bismillah* or *Rasulullah*.

Group I: In this case the lion on the obverse is represented in contour and is standing to the right. On the reverse there is probably the same type of Arabic inscription as noticed in the previous group.



Group J: The obverse design in this group is unclear; it could be figure of a lion in contour standing to the right as we have in Group H. The inscription on the reverse may be read as on Group H but the style of calligraphy is very similar to Group K.



Group K: The last group of the series is distinct from the other because of the Sharada inscription on the obverse. The obverse in this group shows a lion standing to the right as we have in Group I. The curly tail of the lion is turned back towards his head. In the angle of the body and the tail there is a Sharada letter “ma’ or “da”; may be the rest of the inscription is missing. On the reverse of the coins the Arabic is similar to as appears on Group J.



To summarize the above typology of the coins, the obverse designs on the above groups of coins moves on two different directions. On one

hand, we have a human bust and floral or similar designs, while on the other hand the obverse is depicted with a lion changing his direction from right to left or left to right. The reverse designs equally show two variations. In the first case, development of the crescent and star from the circle can be seen while in the second case Arabic inscription was introduced probably showing early phase of Kufic writing style. In a later period both Arabic and Śaradā scripts have been used on the coins.

The Kashmir Smast Islamic period coins are not previously known types and it would not be easy to place them in a certain chronological order. But one thing seems certain that these numismatic evidences fall after the Hun period, may be used just after the Huns occupation of Gandhāra or could have been in use after Hindu Shahi's for which I have little doubt. An attempt has been made here to put them up to some extent in a certain chronological context.

The bulk of coins found at Kashmir Smast mostly consisted of the Kushan period coins, imitation of Menander coins issued during the Kushan period, the Hun period coins with a large number of new varieties or the present lot of coins having close similarity with the Kidāra period coins on one hand and the Hindu Shahi's on the other.

After examination the different types of Islamic period coins found at Kashmir Smast, included in this paper, and analysis of the designs depicted on them, one can get the impression that these Islamic period coins could be associated to a period following the Hindu Shahis era. This can be said due to the existence of the lion drawing marked in outline, which is comparable to that which appears on the Hindu Shahi coins, as well as the Arabic inscriptions. But on the other hand if we compare the supposed Hindu Shahis type lion and other drawings appeared on our coins, except the Arabic inscription, with those of the Huns group of coins and also to understand the denominations of both these types, this may give us another picture. Because the designs on the present group of coins are showing close resemblances with those appeared on the Huns group of coins compare to those of the Hindu Shahi coins. Moreover denomination and materials of both the Huns coins and Islamic period coins are having close similarity compare to the Hindu Shahi period coins..⁹

The new types of coins issued during the Huns period, found Kashmir Smast, have been thoroughly studied by the author.¹⁰ One group of these mentioned coins carries a Kidāra bust on the obverse and a lion in solid on the reverse which could be compared to the lion of the other Kidāra group of coins where on the obverse is mentioned “Shahi” in Brahmi. Similarly the same “Shahi” inscription appears on the obverse of the same group of coins where the reverse design is an elephant commonly found on Hindu Shahis coins. Such Hindu Shahis type elephant appears in combination with a lion drawing on the reverse of the coin; the drawing of the lion could be compared with the lion to be seen on the Kidāra coins which itself is comparable to the one appearing on the Islamic group of our coins.

To resume from the above, the lion in contour is not to be considered a feature typical to the Hindu Shahi period coins but the same is already attested on the coins of the Kidārites, a dynasty that ruled before Hindu Shahi’s invasion of the area. It is possible that the Hindu Shahis themselves borrowed the idea from the Kidārites and used lion drawing on their coins. As far as the other drawings on the present Islamic group of coins are concerned, such as the profile bust in a contour and the crescent with a star, both are not available on Hindu Shahi period coins. Therefore, these symbols could not have been adopted or copied by the Muslim for their coins from the Hindu Shahi but contrary to that they show close association with the Huns coins. It is, therefore, suggested that the present group of Islamic coins may have been issued before the occupation of Gandhāra by the Hindu Shahis and certainly after the Huns invasion in the region. If it was the case then it would mean that the Islamic period coins from Kashmir Smast are the earliest evidences of Islamic coinage in the Indo-Pak subcontinent and it could be placed somewhere between 7th-8th century AD. When exactly and by whom they were issued answer to these questions still remains uncertain and will remain an enigma until other archaeological, epigraphical or literary evidence come into light helping us not only to understand more about the early Islamic period coinage in the region but also to know about their issuers. But as mentioned by Mitchiner¹¹, before the currency reform of AH 77-9 (AD 697-9), coinage were struck in continuance of the pre-existing currencies of the conquered

province by the Muslims; it would be, therefore, possible that the Kashmir Smast coins may have also been went through the same process and could be the result of a similar situation in Gandhāra. The existing currency of the Hun period or pre-Hindu Shahi period was most probably continued with gradual change in designs, the addition of Arabic inscriptions and crescent symbols both representing Islamic ethos. Due to limitation of these coins to Kashmir Smast, it can also be suggested that these coins might have not been used as currency but most probably were taken there to make offerings as it might be the case for the previous unknown Huns group of coins to be found in large number at the same site..¹²

Conclusion:

To conclude from the above and to combine both historical and archaeological sources, it might be suggested that the Muslims started their penetration, if not invasion, in the north-western part of the Indo-Pak subcontinent at least in the second half of the 7th century AD while the invasion of Gandhara may have taken place with the arrival of the Ghaznavid in the 10th/11th century AD or even earlier.

Endnotes

- ¹ Baladhuri, vol. 1, P. 417.
- ² See *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, Vol. 3, p. 48.
- ³ See *Tārīkh*, Vol. 1, p. 260.
- ⁴ See Chachnama: 72-73; Panhwar 1977: 431; Panhwar 1983: 124.
- ⁵ Baladuri, p. 432; Elliot 1956, Vol. 1: 156.
- ⁶ Khan, I 2002: 3.
- ⁷ On the Hindu temple and Banbhore excavation see Khan, F.A 1958.
- ⁸ For more detail see Nasim Khan 2002.
- ⁹ Nasim Khan *et al* 2008.
- ¹⁰ Nasim Khan 2006, Nasim Khan *et al* 2008.
- ¹¹ Mitchiner 1977: 55.
- ¹² Nasim Khan, *et al* 2008: 25).Page 151 of 7.

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